

Bhai Jaita's epic *Sri Gur Kathā*.

a New Milestone in the Sikh Literature

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It is one of the strange ironies of the Sikh tradition that its otherwise vibrant scholarship has hardly taken note of a magnificent text by Bhai Jaita (c.1657-1704), viz. *Sri Gur Katha*, even when it has been in the public domain in print for the past two decades.ⁱ This irony gets a sharper relief with the appearance of the latest comprehensive, brilliant and insightful essay on the sources pertaining to Guru Gobind Singh and his times by Gurinder Singh Mann. It isⁱⁱ quite dismaying that Bhai Jaita's composition available in at least 6 books by then should have escaped the attention of Mann, a meticulous researcher and indefatigable fieldworker of Sikh studies. *Sri Gur Katha* is a powerful and evocative epic, a „story“ of Guru Gobind Singh's life which has potential of settling a few important controversies generated by contentious interpretations of the Sikh tradition. Produced by a Khalsa Sikh unlike most of the early poets and writers, it lends a ring of proximity and authenticity to the central events of the tradition. It emerges as the first contemporary source to talk explicitly about the 5Ks (*panj kakkars*), a detailed description of „*amrit bidhi*“ (*khande di pahul*), the initiation rite, and the „*rahit*“ (code of conduct) as enunciated by the Tenth Master. Being a record by the closest of witnesses, it does not mention any *devi puja* by the Guru while narrating the Khalsa event. Coming from a dalit Sikh (rechristened by Guru Gobind Singh as Jeevan Singh) in the lifetime of the Guru, it offers an unpolluted version of some of the central concerns to the Sikh tradition in general and the Khalsa tradition in particular as compared to the later brahmanical or brahmanised-Sikh interpolations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Written in the prevalent old Punjabi (*sadh bhasha*) of the Sikh tradition, *Sri Gur Katha* is a testimony of Bhai Jaita as a master poet besides an accomplished warrior. Rather than exploring all nuances of the long poem the paper has a limited purpose: to analyze *Sri Gur Katha* to suggest correction of dates respecting Guru

Gobind's birth and the creation of the Khalsa. While highlighting the details about *amrit-bidhi* and *rahit* the paper also argues that it turns out to be the first unambiguous source on the innovative measures introduced by Guru Gobind Singh including the five symbols of the Khalsa.

Growing in the context of the powerful, anti-Brahmanical Sant tradition of 14th and 15th centuries north India, the Sikh variant of Nanak and his successors evolved into an organized religious movement in the Punjab of the 16th and 17th centuries.ⁱⁱⁱ *Guru Granth Sahib*, the sacred text of Sikhism, the new religion, turns out to be a unique world heritage of spiritual wisdom as it comprises compositions of six of the 10 Sikh Gurus, contributions of 15 Sikh bards and 15 non-Sikh sant poets of diverse social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Seeped in egalitarian philosophy, the whole Sikh movement mushroomed in the proximity of thinker-people, an organic relationship between the Guru and the people. At the pinnacle of the Sikh thought, the merger of the guru with disciple/s (*aape gur chela*) achieves the radical position within Indian pedagogical and religious tradition. J. P. S. Uberoi puts it aptly in the case of Guru Gobind Singh: „The tenth guru of the Sikhs... became in effect the disciple of his disciples at the new revolutionary moment of reversal, inversion and reflection of the leader/follower relation“. ^{iv} No wonder it became a rallying point for the mass of low-caste shudras and untouchables for a respectable and dignified social existence. Being a „religion of the book“ from within the Indian tradition, it encouraged its disciples to listen, read, write and reproduce knowledge around the new creed. Primarily for this reason, the Sikh movement has generated a respectable body of literature, both hagiographical and scholarly, over the last four hundred years. The untouchables also got access to letters, otherwise prohibited under the strict laws of Manu, and expressed their emotions and creativity through poetry and music. Bhai Jaita's brilliant epic became a reality due to the sharp intervention of Sikhs in the general Hindu ethos.

Sikhism has benefited from worldwide scholarship in the last 150 years resulting in large number of books, tracts, journals, newspapers, research monographs and articles on religion, history, polity and society. The strong Punjabi and Sikh Diaspora have also boosted the

proliferation of literature on various facets of Punjabi life and Sikh religion. But this body of literature has not essentially followed the Guru's egalitarian and cosmopolitan agenda. Falling prey to the demon of Brahmanism in the nineteenth century scholarship on the Sikh religion has generally ignored the social issues of caste and untouchability for a long time and even attempted to ignore Dalit contributions in the making of the Sikh religion. ^{vi} In this context excavating dalit material on Sikhism acquires a special significance for assuring the credibility of Sikh tradition. If the tradition is not ready to voluntarily undertake the task and insists on projecting an egalitarian character then it must acknowledge and readily incorporate enriching dalit experiences for a more viable future.

The fact that a large number of Dalits, seeking liberation from Hindu caste discrimination and degradation, had joined and secured respectable status within the Sikh Order is exemplified by the Gurus' special relations with some of the Dalit families. Guru Nanak's life-long spiritual companion, especially on his long travels across the continent, was Mardana, a dalit musician from the Mirasi caste community. It is understandable that numerous dalit families had joined the new creed right from the first Guru's time. One notable Dalit family happens to be of Bhai Jaita. His great grandfather, Bhai Kaliana of Kathunangal village near Amritsar, is said to have become Sikh during Akbar's time. He had served well the Fourth and Fifth gurus. His son Sukhbhan, who had migrated to Delhi, was a great musician and established a music school „Kalyan Ashram“ named after his father in the nearby village Raiseena. Kalyan Ashram later came to be known as „Kalayane di Dharamshala“ and the Sikh visitors to Delhi used to lodge there. Even Guru Teg Bahadur had lodged in the Dharamshala on 20th January 1670 on his return journey from Assam. ^{vii} Sukhbhan's son Jasbhan was an equally accomplished musician and a notable Sikh of Delhi, close to the Seventh Guru. His two sons, Agya Ram and Sada Nand, continued to render Gurbani in musical notes for the Delhi Sikh congregations. Sada Nand emerged as an accomplished musician and turned out to be a close companion of Guru Teg Bahadur as Mardana was of Guru Nanak. ^{viii} It was Jaita, the elder son of Sadanand, who was

entrusted by the Ninth Guru to carry his hymns to Gobind at Anandpur from his incarceration in Delhi as stated by Kavi Kankan. ^{ix} Such intimate ties of his family with Sikh gurus and his complete devotion can be seen as a definite motivation for Jaita to carry the severed head of Guru Tegh Bahadar with daredevilry under the most violent circumstances from Delhi to Kiratpur in 1675. There is no wonder in young Gobind's getting overwhelmed with emotions and embracing Bhai Jaita and honouring him with the famous blessing „*Ranghrete Guru ke Bete*’ (The untouchables are Guru's sons). Kankan also refers to the Tenth Guru's conferring upon the Mazhabi^x Sikhs the special rights of ablutions in the *amrit-sarovar* of Harimandir (Golden Temple) on this occasion. ^{xi} Undoubtedly Jaita had emerged as a fearless Sikh warrior who so endeared himself to the Tenth Guru that he was acknowledged by the Guru as the *Panjwan Sahibjada* (the Fifth Son) in addition to his own four sons. ^{xii} It is at the time of the creation of the Khalsa that he was rechristened as Jeevan Singh. He was killed in a fierce battle with the Mughal armies in 1704 at Chamkaur.

Bhai Jaita's *Sri Gur Katha* is his tribute to Sikhi in general and the last Guru in particular. The manuscript seemingly remained inaccessible to mainstream scholars because of its possession only with some of the Mazhabi Sikh families. The two manuscripts or copies that surfaced in the mid twentieth century have an interesting tale as narrated by Naranjan Singh Arifi, a passionate researcher of Mazhabi Sikhs and author of *Ranghretian da Itihas*. It was in 1973 that Arifi was told by Dhanna Singh Gulshan ^{xiii}, an accomplished *kavishar* (singing poet) and former Akali Dal MP and Union Minister, that he had procured a *Sri Gur Katha* manuscript from Santa Singh, father of the celebrated Punjabi poet Sadhu Daya Singh Arif (1894-1946) ^{xiv}, who in turn had got it from Baba Bir Singh of village Muthhianwala in Firozepur district. Gulshan had a desire to work on the manuscript but his busy political life prevented him from getting at the job. Meanwhile, Giani Garja Singh (1907-1977) ^{xv}, a keen collector and scholar of Sikh manuscripts, borrowed *Sri Gur Katha* from Gulshan and lost it. Fortunately the Giani had prepared a copy of the manuscript. The second manuscript was discovered by Arifi from the

same family of Daya Singh Arif. This manuscript was gifted to Daya Singh Arif's son Kultar Singh, who was an accomplished musician, by the Assam Sikhs on one of his *kirtani jatha*'s visits to that area in 1950s. ^{xvi} The latter manuscript, 18.1x11.45 cms, presently in custody of Naranjan Singh Arifi carries 36 folios; tightly written in unbroken line it can be identified as the „Assam Ms“.

Dating of individuals and events of Sikh history has been a major problem with majority of the hagiographic or other sources of Sikh religion. *Sri Gur Katha* is no exception. There is no date of its composition as none of the events and episodes it records are dated. But the excellent long poem carries poet's authorial name; Jaiyata or Jaiyate figures 13 times whereas as Jeevan Singh he registers himself at 5 places. The *Katha* opens with an invocation, unfolds with „*ardaas*‘, sings of praises of 10 Gurus in „*ustati*‘, portrays the personality of Guru Gobind Singh in „*Chitra*“, moves to the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur, Guru's convocation of a *divan* at Damdama (Anandpur) and conferring of new identity of Singhs onto the Five Beloved, narrates a story of Jaita's rescuing a Brahmin's wife forcefully retained by a Turk, moves on to the machinations of Bhim Chand resulting in Guru's moving to Paunta and construction of forts, provides a fair picture of the Battle of Bhangani, brings the Guru back to Anandpur soon thereafter^{xvii} where a new *panth* of Khalsa is finally launched, describes the qualities and form of the new Sikh/Singh with an explicit mention of *panj kakkar*. The *Katha* concludes with two sections of exceptional quality on „*amrit bidhi*“ and „*rahit*“. If we keep the sequence of episodes in the *Katha* in mind while granting a fair sense of chronological order to its composer, a different sets of alternative dates as juxtaposed to the generally accepted but also doubted dates relating to Guru Gobind Singh's life and times emerge.

A close reading of *Sri Gur Katha* hints at the event of the „creation of Khalsa“ in two phases rather than a single event as so far understood. The first phase is a pre-Bhangani call by the Guru to the Sikhs from far and wide to come with war material for an assembly at Anandpur and then conferring the title of „Singhs“ to the five Sikhs who came forward to give their lives in

the dramatic convocation. ^{xviii} That was apparently done to infuse a new spirit in the Sikhs to prepare them for the impending wars. But that seems to have been just a beginning of the process with not many assuming the title of Singh as is clear from the names of Sango Sah and Jeet Mal, the close relatives of the Guru, who were killed at Bhangani. Presumably even Jaita had not yet become a „Singh“. Having tested the success of the experiment in the battlefield of Bhangani and back in Anandpur, the Guru thought of then launching the „New Panth“ of Khalsa with an elaborate *amrit* ceremony of „*khande dee pahul*“. Though Bhai Jaita talks of „*rahit-kurahit*“ explained to the assembled in the first phase, he stresses the institution of the Khalsa with the initiation by *amrit* ceremony. It is at this stage Jaita becomes Jeevan Singh:

Sabad:

Nandpur sahar Gobind ko beta Jaiyata naam liyo ree
 Sabad surti kau mel kai satgur naam ko daan diyo ree.
 Satgur runk kau bhupati karheN ais sukam kiyo ree
 Khaalas bhaye akhaalas Sikh gan amritpaan kiyo ree.
 Tab te Gobind panth niyara sab jag maan liyo ree
 Panth kau sog birodh harakh te mukta jaan liyo ree.
 Sachkhand aur Anandpuri kau ek samaan kiyo ree
 Hari meihn harijan leen bhaye hain harijas gaan kiyo ree.

Dohira:

Prabh kripa kar dijiye Jeewan Singh ko daan
 Tan man dhan arpit karuNh preeti kai pramaan. ^{xix}

Gobind“s son Jaiyata has taken the *naam* in Anandpur city
 Satgur has blessed him with the *naam* in its purity.
 Satgur has rendered a pious act by turning the paupers into kings
 By taking *amrit* the impure Sikhs have become pure Khalsa.
 Since then the world has accepted the Gobind Panth as distinct
 and recognised it as free from anger, sorrows, and conflicts.
 Anandpur has now become a heavenly abode
 where Lord's devotees are immersed in singing His glories.

Be merciful and bless Jeewan Singh, O Lord!
 As I surrender to you entirely in true love.

The three important dates of Sikh history for reconsideration as suggested by Gurinder Singh Mann are: birth of Gobind in 1666, creation of the Khalsa in 1699, and replacement of the personal Guru with Guru Granth in 1708.^{xx} Since the last episode is exterior to *Sri Gur Katha*, its composer having died in the Battle of Chamkaur in 1704, its implicit potential to contribute significantly to the other two vital episodes is very important. Apparently there is no seventeenth century source on the birth date of Guru Gobind Singh but as pointed out by Mann the four eighteenth-century sources, Chaupa Singh (1700), Kesar Singh Chhibbar (1769), Sarup Das Bhalla (1776), and Sarup Singh Kaushish (1790) mention the year of his birth as 1661 while it is only Sukha Singh (1797) who records it as 1666 and quite strangely such a late source has come to be accepted by the later Sikh tradition as the correct date.^{xxi} *Sri Gur Katha* would be helpful but only in conjunction with the dating of the Khalsa. None of the eighteenth century sources places it in 1699; majority of them situate the creation of Khalsa between 1695 and 1698 while the minor voice of Koer Singh Kalal places it in 1689. It is only the late-nineteenth century „invention“ of 1699 by Giani Gian Singh which has enjoyed the wide acceptance since then. But the latest discovery by Mann of „new category of artifacts“ especially copper-plates (*tamar patar*) attributed to Guru Gobind Singh has posed a new challenge to the scholars. The copper-plate issued in 1679 bestowed on Jawala Das Brahman of a Shiva temple in Kapal Mochan near Paunta assumes a special significance as it talks about Khalsa while Guru's name is inscribed as „Gobind Singh“.^{xxii}

If we follow Bhai Jaita's sequence of events the first phase of the creation of Khalsa comes in quick succession to the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur. After he offered the severed head of the Guru to the young Gobind, the Ranghretas were pronounced as sons of the Guru. The popular saying „*ranghrete guru ke bete*“ gets confirmed by Jaita's self statement: „*Jaiyate taaranhaar gur, taar diye Ranghret.de. Gur paras ne kar diye Ranghrete gur bet.de.*“^{xxiii} (The mighty guru has saved the *Ranghretas*. With his magical touch, the guru has turned *Ranghretas* into his own sons.) Martyrdom is presented by Jaita as the major reason for Guru Gobind to

analyse the critical situation and for charting a new strategy for the Sikh community. The Guru is shown to be wondering why the Sikhs of Delhi did not stand by their guru; why they did not feel ashamed at their inaction; why even the Muslims could not recognise the Sikhs as different; why even the young Sikhs turned into stones; why the Hindustanis did not feel agitated; why their arms turned into pieces of straw; why they could not rise to the occasion and could not know their grand duty?^{xxiv} Contemplating on these questions the Guru resolved to empower the Sikhs with a new identity as warriors and intellectuals. Guru Gobind spent several days in reflection on the pros and cons of such a move at Damdama in Anandpur and then came out with an unsheathed sword while singing paeans to the weapon. He then sent messages to the Sikhs in all directions to come to Damdama with weapons and horses and thus created Khalsa.^{xxv} If we now keep the Kapal Mochan copper-plate issued by the Guru in 1679 with his name inscribed as „Guru Gobind Singh“ and also keep Bhai Jaita’s sequence of events in *Sri Gur Katha* it comes closer to Mann’s suggestion for reconsidering the date, we are in a position to place the first phase between 1676 and 1678. While the „Five Beloved“ are conferred with the title of „Singhs“, the Guru himself assuming the same title and then inscribing it on the 1679 copper-plate makes sense. In conjunction with Bhai Jaita’s narrative it becomes easy to give credence to Koer Singh’s 1689 as the date of the creation of Khalsa and that makes still a better sense keeping in mind with what spirit and vigour several battles were successfully fought by Sikhs, now mostly Singhs.

If we accept the earliest date of 1676 for the creation of Khalsa, it sounds prudent to rethink about 1666 as the date of birth of Gobind Rai as popularly accepted so far, for the simple reason that it is difficult to think of a ten years’ lad, howsoever genius he could have been, to make a world-shaking shift for the Sikh community. Rather than accepting Sukha Singh’s late-eighteenth century date, it seems reasonable to accept the other eighteenth century sources identifying 1661 as the birth year of Gobind Rai. If he were 14 or 15 years old at the time of his father’s martyrdom, it was within Guru Gobind Singh’s capacity to mull over the circumstances,

to reflect upon and analyse the evolution of the Sikh community and then while looking at the politically grave situation to think of a radically different strategy to cope up with the emergent challenges. This also offers us an opportunity to date the writing of *Sri Gur Katha*. There is no mention of any other battle or event after post-Bhangani launch of „Khalsa Panth“ by Bhai Jaita even while he remained close to the Guru till his death in Chamkaur. It is likely the epic was composed in early 1690s which would make it the earliest work to talk about Guru Gobind Singh's „*rahit*“ and „*khande dee pahul*“ in detail.

None of the earlier sources, not even the late-eighteenth or early nineteenth century, talks of „Panj Kakkars“. Ever since the Singh Sabha's authoritative sanction to the Guru's injunctions in this respect in the last quarter of the nineteenth century it has occupied the attention and energy of the Sikh scholars to find academic answers to the opaqueness about such a central issue in the sources. In an exhaustive analysis of these sources and also of their twentieth century interpretations, W. H. McLeod while accepting the possibility of the five items having been worn by the Khalsa Sikhs since the earliest days of the order reaches a conclusion that there is no evidence that Guru Gobind Singh decreed the Five Ks and promulgated at the inauguration of the Khalsa.^{xxvi} One wishes he had seen and studied *Sri Gur Katha* as well to clear the fog with his own mind. It is Bhai Jaita's *Sri Gur Katha* which mentions all the 5 Ks in the most explicit manner:

Sawwaiya:

PaaNch bade prabh ke dar heiN,
 Ar paaNch ka maan hai gurdarbare.
 Kripaan Kada Kachh Kes KaNkat,
 Kar deeneheN nischai paaNch kakkare.
 PaaNch kakkar diye gur ne,
 PuNj paaNch ka paaNch vikaaran maare.
 Bhed koyee gop nahi en mahiN,
 Prabh ke chinH paaNch prabhu ati piyare.^{xxvii}

Five large portals to His threshold!
 And five are revered in the Lord's court!
 Kripaan Kara Kacch Kesh Kangha,
 Established as the Five „K"s.

Five Kakkaar the Guru gave:
A fist of five to fell five evils.
Not a wisp of opacity in these,
The Lord's cherished symbols - Five.^{xxviii}

Once Guru Gobind Singh had fixed the five symbols for a distinct identity of the Khalsa he also made changes in the earlier practice of Sikh initiation with an elaborate ritual of „*amrit bidhi*“ as given by Bhai Jaita:

Sawwaiya:

When an *amrit* seeker approaches, handpick five noble Singhs.
All may take a bath washing hairs as well and step into garments fresh and clean.
Now spread a clean blanket and all should sit on it.
Upon the blanket place an iron bowl, let all bridle their gaze and attend upon it.¹

Inspect the initiate for symbols five and let him sit before the five Gursikhs.
Add sugar-coins to water in the bowl and seat all the six heroic Sikhs.
With a dagger (*khanda*) the first stirs sugar-coins (*batasa*) and water in the sacrament bowl.
As he stirs he recites the Jap scripture, the other hand he holds over the bowl.²

The other four join in, their hands extended over the bowl to consecrate the *amrit*.
Each of the Five in their turn recites the five scriptures.
With chanting the Jap, Jaap, Sawaiye, Chaupai, Anand consecrate the *amrit*.
Let the Initiate drink it five times with cupped hands and dab with it his eyes and tresses.³

With each gulp of the Amrit the Initiate chants Waheguru ki Fateh.
Let all who have gathered for baptisms ingest *amrit* from the same basin of iron.
Enlightening all about the code of conduct (*rahit-kurahit*), render the prayer and distribute *parshaad*.
Celebrate the baptism with sharing a meal, eaten by all from the same plate.⁴^{xxix}

After making a clear statement on 5Ks and offering the details of the initiation ritual Bhai Jaita elaborates Guru Gobind Singh's manual of the Sikh, more specifically the Singh code of conduct, the *Rahit*, in the closing section of *Sri Gur Katha*. A paraphrasing of the 10 quatrains is offered here to have a complete picture of the Guru's injunctions. A Guru's Singh by keeping God in his mind should visualise the war. Without looking into his own comforts, the Singh must help any person in need. By discarding all distinctions of high or low caste he must consider all

humans as children of God. He must discard all brahmanical practices and only follow Gurus' teachings. | 1| A Singh must decorate himself with weapons (*sastar*) as symbols of God. Without weapons a man is like a jackal as the light of the third eye vanishes. The weapons are necessary for meditation as they provide security to concentrate on His Name. | 2| A Singh should not cut his hair and keep himself away from a hair-shaving blade (*romantak*). By tying a turban (*dastaar*) over his head he should be ready in the complete form (*saabat surat*) without piercing the nose and ears. When the Singhs meet they must greet each other with the salutation of victory be God's (*Waheguruji kee fateh*). He must feed anyone hungry before eating his meal. | 3| Without forgetting a Singh should not touch smoke-pipe (*hukka*), marijuana (*charas*), tobacco and Muslim style mutton (*kuthha*). He should not wear red garments and should have no friendship with a smoker. He should always be in the company of Singhs and avoid unnecessary friendship with non-Singhs. He should only love and cohabit his wife only while considering all other women as his mothers or daughters. | 4| A Singh must discard all brahmanical and superstitious beliefs and rituals performed either for personal gain and others' harm. Ancestral worship and astrological beliefs are prohibited for the Singhs. He should give up all kinds of fraud, deceit, gambling, injustice, untruth, and refrain from speaking ill of others. | 5| While doing business is considered the best and agriculture as the middle profession, a Singh must earn his livelihood from an honest labour of hands. He should not accept any service other than of a soldier. A Singh should not bow his head before any deity except the Almighty. | 6| A Singh should not eye others' money and property. He should labour hard and should never infringe others' rights. A Singh should not attack the unarmed and should not assault anyone on the run. He should never bow his head at graves and mausoleums. | 7| A Singh should not accept food from the affluent who in his vanity considers himself as the benefactor of others. He should also not accept victuals offered to deities other than his own. By accepting others' Prasad, there is always a danger of getting corrupted and loosing ones faith. | 8| A Singh should eat and sleep moderately and never eat with greed. Considering all food as God's blessing he should never reject any food as bad. Every food that is suitable to the body and mind is sacred and should be

eaten with garments on the body.⁹ A Singh should not mourn when someone dies. The dying person should be placed on a cot, should not be left on the ground. Accepting it as God's Will as true everyone should eat to one's taste. The Sikhs should not follow the prevailing practices related with death and should remember God's Name and sing his praises.¹⁰ ^{xxx}

As a work of poetry, *Sri Gur Katha* stands out as one of the finer pieces of Punjabi literature. Composed in the last decade of the seventeenth century, its language, diction and vocabulary is the same as used in the Dasam Granth, attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, and other poets attached to the Guru's court. Bhai Jaita emerges as an accomplished poet using popular but also difficult *chhands* prevalent at the time. Rendering his poetry in *saabad*, *sawaiya*, *soratha*, *kabit*, *sirkhandi*, *chaupai*, *kundaliya*, *rola* and *adil* he has also used the most lyrical *dohira*. Looking at Bhai Jaita's command over language and maturity of his poetry and the manner in which it surfaced very late in the public domain it is not difficult to assume that he could have composed other works as well. But given the violent times in which a large literary heritage of Sikhs was lost it is possible that his other work/s could have met a similar fate. Notwithstanding such speculations, *Sri Gur Katha* turns out to be a major milestone in Sikh literature as it becomes the earliest source on the 'creation of Khalsa', new initiation '*khande dee pahul*' and Guru Gobind Singh's *rahit*. Most importantly, it becomes the first testimony, an eyewitness account, to talk unambiguously about the 5Ks (*Panj Kakaar*), in a way textually validating the late nineteenth century Singh Sabha assertion based on the Khalsa Sikh memories and practices. *Sri Gur Katha* emerges as a significant milestone in Sikh history and literature—an implicit assistant in settling the issue of two major dates regarding Guru Gobind Singh's life, namely his birth and creation of the Khalsa.

i *Sri Gur Katha* was first published in Naranjan Arifi's *Ranghrehit da Itihas (Adi kal ton 1850 tak)*, Part I, (Amritsar: Literature House, 1993), 396-424. Subsequently he had a monograph *Shaheed Bhai Jaita Jee* (Amritsar: Literature House, n.d.). Jaswant Singh included it in his *Guru ke Bete*, (Delhi: Bhartiya Dalit Sahit Akadmi, 2000), 367-413. Gurmukh Singh came up with a monograph *Bhai Jaita Ji: Jiwan te Rachna*, (Amritsar:

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- Literature House, 2003), 49-82. Ishar Singh also gave the entire text in his *Sikh Itihas de Visre Panne*, (Chandigarh: Lokgeet Parkashan, 2005), 83-110 as Baldev Singh also appended the poem to his novel *Panjwan Sahibjada*, (Ludhiana: Chetna Prakashan, 2005), 465-501. For a useful explanatory notes to the poem see Giani Nishan Singh Gandiwind, *Shaheed Baba Jiwan Singh: Jeevan, Rachna te Viakhia*, (Amritsar: Bhai Chatar Singh Jeevan Singh, 2008)
- ii Gurinder Singh Mann, „Sources for the Study of Guru Gobind Singh’s Life and Times”, (*Journal of Punjab Studies*, 15, 1&2, 2008), 239-280
- iii For a broad range of the bhakti „sant” movements and issues see Karine Schomer and W. H. McLeod, eds. *The Saints: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1987)
- iv J. P. S. Uberoi, *Religion, Civil Society and the State: A study of Sikhism*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 74.
- v Very largely it is due to the presence of Sikhs in North America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand that the Western scholarship has turned toward Sikh Studies. Starting with the Berkeley conference in 1976 that resulted in *Sikh Studies: Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Tradition* edited by Mak Juergensmeyer and others in 1979, there have been several such meets on Sikh Studies in the Western world. For a comprehensive account of these developments see J. S. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition*, (Delhi: Manohar, 1998), 9-19. The last scholarly collection taking stock of Sikh studies is *Textures of the Sikh Past: New Historical Perspectives*, Tony Ballantyne, ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- vi „Caste” and „untouchability” came to afflict the Sikhs and afflict them badly in the last two centuries. There was a gradual rise of Sanatan Sikhism, a fine admixture of Brahmanism and Sikhism, in the second half of the eighteenth century (See Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 105-106). Its first textual expression is best available in Kesar Singh Chhibber’s *Bansavalinama*, completed in 1769. According to J. S. Grewal „Whether consciously or unconsciously, Kesar Singh Chhibber makes a consistent and an earnest attempt at Brahmanizing the Khalsa tradition.” (“Brahmanizing the Tradition: Chhibber’s Bansavalinama,” in *The Khalsa: Sikh and Non-Sikh Perspectives*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 2004), 85-86). It is to the consolidation of Ranjit Singh’s rule that Brahmanization of the Sikh religion can be seen clearly. Henry Steinbach, an European soldier in Ranjit Singh’s army, made an astute observation: „The assumption of irresponsible power by Ranjeet Singh destroyed, in some degree, the potency of the Khalsa” (*The Punjab: Being a brief Account of the Country of the Sikhs*, (1846; reprint, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1976), 159). That the Hindu practices were fast creeping into Sikh culture during Ranjit Singh’s time was also observed by another European traveller in 1836, Baron Charles Hugel, who noted that „like every other religion grounded in deism, the faith of the Sikhs is already deteriorated; image worship and distinction of castes are gradually taking place of the precepts enjoined by their original institutions” (Major T. B. Jervis, trans., *Travels in Kashmir and Panjab containing a Particular Account of the Government and Character of the Sikhs*, (1845; reprint, Delhi: Low Price

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- Publications, 2000), 283). Bhagat Lakshman Singh (1863-1944), a Sikh scholar, believed that the Sikh creed was „Hindu-ized“ after the establishment of Sikh rule. The high caste Hindus had made advances for reconciliation with the new power, and a compromise was affected by which the Sikhs abandoned their „revolutionary program“. Sikhism began to lose its distinct identity (J. S. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition*, (Delhi: Manohar, 1998), 71).
- vii Fauza Singh and Taran Singh, *Sri Guru Teg Bahadur: Jivan te Rachna*, (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1987), 47
- viii The daughter of a renowned musician in the Mughal Emperor's court Pandit Shiv Narayan had fallen in love with Sadanand, adamant that she would marry only him. Knowing that Sadanand came from an untouchable family, Shiv Narayan was reluctant to get her daughter Lajwanti married to him. Though he agreed for such a match on her daughter's firm resolve but later cancelled his decision in the face of strong opposition from the rest of the Brahmans. It was only on Guru Teg Bahadur's intervention that the marriage was solemnized. For details, see Arifi, op.cit. 224-26. Guru Gobind Singh's court poet Kankan mentions this marriage: „Khoha khohee des meiN machia julm nisaNg. Kankan khun kutumb ka dolhi jaye Aurang.178 Vapas nagar Koel [Aligarh] se aaye nauNveN avtar. Huyee saadi sada Nanad kee, kirpa karee apaar.179“ *Sanchhep Das Gur Katha krit Kavi Kankan*, edited by Dr Gurmukh Singh, (Chandigarh: Raghubir Rachna Prakashan, 1991), 55
- ix „Bani likh pothi kari bheji Jaite paas. Tin deenee Gobind Rai aise kar ardaas.196.“ See *Sanchhep Das Gur Katha krit Kavi Kankan*, 56
- x Kahan Singh Nabha defines „Mazhabi“ as the one who follows religion; in Sikh tradition it is used for the Khalsa Singh. But he states that the caste-conceited Sikhs has reserved this for *Chuhra*s (untouchables) who adopted Sikhism. See *Gurshabad Ratnakar: Mahan Kosh*, (New Delhi: National Book Shop, 2006), 941. The word „Ranghreta“ is derived from „Ranghar“, a Rajput who had accepted Islam. Ranghreta is a son of Ranghar but interestingly in the Sikh religion it is used for Chuhra. Ibid. 1052. Most probably Chuhra came to be recognized as Ranghretas among Sikhs because of their bravery and courage with which they defended the new religion under attack in the seventeenth century.
- xi „Mazhabi upar satigur aisi kirpa keej, Sri Amritsar taal kee baahi chauthi deen. 223“, Ibid, 59. No wonder such a reward was present in the memories of Mazhabi Sikhs that they succeeded in constructing a *bunga* (a lodge) on that fourth side, closer to Bunga Ramgarhian, in 1826. *Ranghrehit da Itihas*, 464
- xii A renowned Punjabi writer Baldev Singh wrote a long novel on Bhai Jaita entitled *Panjwan Sahibjada*, (Ludhiana: Chetna Prakashan, 2005).
- xiii See Mewa Singh Sidhu, ed., *Dhanna Singh Gulshan di Chonvin Kavita*, (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1985).
- xiv For details see Atam Hamrahi, *Sadhu Daya Singh Arif*, (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1990, 2 print)

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- xv See Gurmukh Singh, *Giani Garja Singh Di Itihasak Khoj*, (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2010). Gurmukh Singh had used the 1950 copy of *Sri Gur Katha* prepared by Giani Garja Singh in his monograph *Bhai Jaita Ji: Jiwan te Rachna*. Giani Nishan Singh Gandiwind used the same copy in his *Shaheed Baba Jiwan Singh*.
- xvi *Ranghrehit da Itihas*, 393-395. This manuscript is in the personal custody of Naranjan Singh Arifi in Faridkot. I am grateful to Arifi for allowing me to take photos of this Assam manuscript which is being used in this paper.
- xvii While analyzing Kavi Sainapati's *Sri Gur Sobha*, Ganda Singh places the Battle of Bhangani on 18th September 1688. And after over a month Guru Gobind Singh left Paunta, attended a fair at Kapal Mochan before reaching Anandpur. See *Sri Gur Sobha*, edited by Ganda Singh, (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1967), 15-16
- xviii *Sri Gur Katha*, 18-19. All folio numbers from the text are given from the Assam Manuscript. Translation mine.
- xix *Sri Gur Katha*, 28
- xx Gurinder Singh Mann, „Sources for the Study of Guru Gobind Singh's Life and Times“, (*Journal of Punjab Studies*, 15, 1&2, 2008), 239, 257
- xxi For details see *Ibid.* 257 & 279n
- xxii *Ibid.* 238-239
- xxiii *Sri Gur Katha*, dohira, 16
- xxiv *Ibid* 16-17
- xxv *Ibid*, 17-19
- xxvi W. H. McLeod, *Sikhs of the Khalsa: A History of the Khalsa Rahit*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 212
- xxvii *Sri Gur Katha*, 31-32
- xxviii I am thankful to Neeti Singh, Assistant Professor of English at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda for her help in the translation of the stanza.
- xxix *Sri Gur Katha*, 32-33. Translation facilitated by Neeti Singh.
- xxx *Sri Gur Katha*, 33-35.